LEARNING WORK

THE WAY AHEAD FOR BRITISH COLUMBIANS

Report of the
British Columbia Task Force
on Employment & Training

Executive Summary

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Report of the British Columbia Task Force on Employment & Training

The Task Force on Employment and Training was announced on August 17, 1989 by the Minister of Advanced Education, Training and Technology.

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BRITISH COLUMBIA WAKES UP TO A NEW WORLD OF WORK

In recent times, especially since the early 1980s, basic shifts have been reshaping how British Columbians earn their livings. For example, there are fewer job opportunities in some of the traditional industrial sectors such as forestry, but more opportunities in services.

Young people today are much less likely to leave high school and walk into life-long careers in the resource industries, as their fathers did. Production has become automated to the point where fewer workers are needed. For example, in the woods manufacturing industry, employment has fallen steadily over the past decade while output per worker has increased very significantly.

Forestry is not unique in experiencing profound workforce changes. Overall, the British Columbia labour market is being reshaped by a dynamic mix of three factors: globalization of the marketplace, technological progress, and demographic change.

Globalization of the marketplace has created an environment where not only products but also jobs and industries move across borders. Decisions are based on business considerations. British Columbia is weighed on global scales when industry searches for the most efficient and profitable bases of operation, and this includes the skills of the workforce.

BRITISH COLUMBIA WAKES UP TO A NEW WORLD OF WORK

As in the forest industry, technological progress often results in fewer jobs as industries — especially in the manufacturing sector — introduce more efficient production machinery. At the same time, technological change also opens new fields of employment, with the accompanying need for worker retraining.

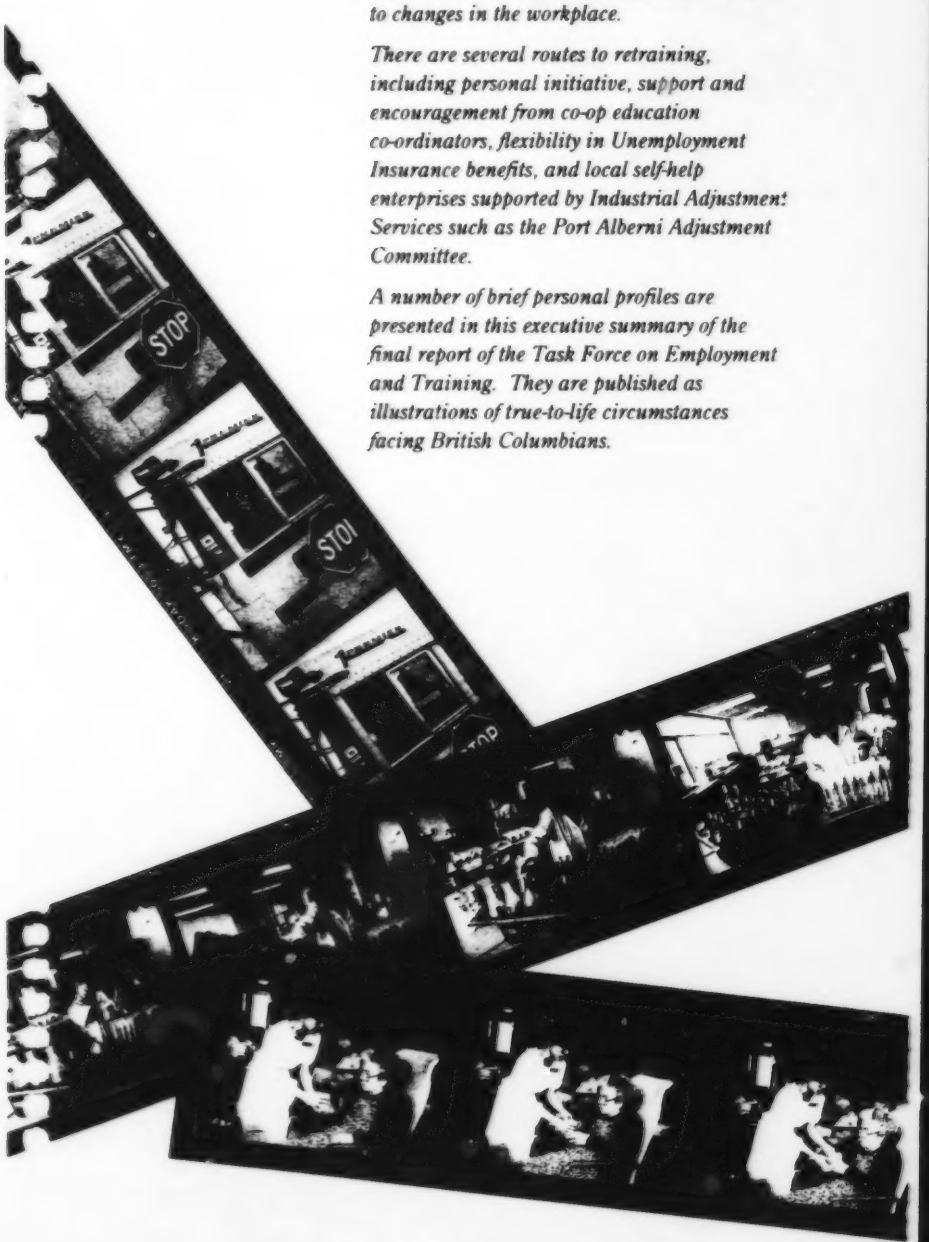
The population of British Columbia is changing. Over the next two decades the average age of the population will increase from its current 34 years to 41 years. As a result of immigration trends, a growing segment of our population does not have English as its native language.
Given current immigration policy, it is expected that this trend will continue. From this trend flows the need to develop language and literacy programs to help integrate new participants into the province's workforce.

THE PROFILES

The need to retrain for new careers is already a reality for many British Columbians. In communities throughout the province, there are examples of how individuals are adapting to changes in the workplace.

There are several routes to retraining, including personal initiative, support and encouragement from co-op education co-ordinators, flexibility in Unemployment Insurance benefits, and local self-help enterprises supported by Industrial Adjustment Services such as the Port Alberni Adjustment Committee.

A number of brief personal profiles are presented in this executive summary of the final report of the Task Force on Employment and Training. They are published as illustrations of true-to-life circumstances facing British Columbians.



Linda and Vu Le

To escape arbitrary jailing and an economic system rife with bribery, Linda and Vu Le fled Vietnam in a small boat crowded with 42 people. They arrived in Canada knowing little English. They stayed with family in Vancouver, under crowded conditions. Family connections helped Linda find work as a seamstress. Since arriving, they have taken English courses at Vancouver Community College then, with help through the Canadian Jobs Strategy program, enrolled in a long-term care aide training program at a private college in Vancouver. The course features English as a second language, nursing care aide skills training and on-the-job work experience. Career skill seminars helped them overcome some of the cultural obstacles to working in Canada.

Linda, 24, graduated first and found employment even before the course finished. Vu, 29, is about to graduate and he, too, has already found employment. Their plans include more English courses in the time outside work and, eventually, both intend to become registered nurses.

It was in the face of such changes in the province's labour market that the Minister of Advanced Education, Training and Technology created the British Columbia Task Force on Employment and Training in August, 1989.

The work of the Task Force was done against the background of British Columbia's experiences in the severe recession of the early 1980s when permanent job loss affected the province's labour force more deeply than Canada's as a whole.

Even though there was a relatively greater use of adjustment mechanisms — such as training, wage flexibility and regional mobility — British Columbians still experienced longer periods of unemployment and higher rates of unemployment than Canadians on average.

Today, with the experiences of the early 1980s still fresh in mind, British Columbia industry and workers are facing new economic forces. The ability to adapt to the new stresses — to meet the demands being placed on working people and their employers — is the key to sustaining jobs and a healthy economy in British Columbia.

Accordingly, the Minister assigned the Task Force a three-part mandate.

- *First, the Task Force was directed to develop recommendations on key short-term issues related to employment and training.*

- *Second, the Task Force was to recommend long-term strategies to improve the employability of British Columbia workers and to increase employment opportunities. This was to include recommending ideas on how to help prevent structural unemployment and how to help workers adjust when they lose their jobs.*

- *Third, the Task Force was to recommend a permanent mechanism for keeping industry, labour and the provincial government advised of concerns about employment and training, with a view to achieving consensus.*

The Task Force report makes recommendations on each part of the mandate. There is a special focus, however, on the second charge, that is, long-term strategies.

The findings are presented in the main report, a series of technical papers, and in this executive summary. The technical papers contain the outcomes of the research commissioned by the Task Force.

Afroza Yasmim Alam

In her native Bangladesh, Afroza Yasmim Alam, 34, earned a bachelor of science degree and a master's degree in library science. She emigrated to Canada in 1990 with her husband and two children. Since arriving, she has been unable to secure a job as a librarian because she lacks the necessary English language skills. In the meantime, she works as a lab technician.

With financial help through the federal government, she has enrolled in a sales and service program at a private college. The program features work placement and training in English as a second language. She is also taking a course for library technicians at Langara College with the hope of eventually securing an entry-level job at a library in Greater Vancouver.

Rob Sorensen

Rob Sorensen is young, university educated and an entrepreneur. He's also part of a new and growing sector of the British Columbia workforce, sometimes called the dynamic service sector.

Sorensen, who is 27 and disabled, worked in short-term jobs after graduating in computer sciences from the University of Victoria. But conventional employment presented him with obstacles. In 1987, Sorensen enrolled in a month-long Young Entrepreneurs program, sponsored by the provincial government. Today, his company employs four computer professionals and custom designs software under contract to the provincial government, municipalities and the private sector.

He advocates more encouragement for entrepreneurs,including more entrepreneurial training; government loan guarantees for small business; carefully thought out reforms in the unemployment insurance system to provide self-employed people with a degree of security; and more information to improve small business access to government programs.

THE RESEARCH MILESTONE

The first obstacle encountered by the Task Force was the lack of comprehensive data on what has been happening to the British Columbia labour market in recent years. In some cases, this lack required the Task Force to study data for Canada and Ontario, then apply what was appropriate to British Columbia. In other cases, new research was commissioned. Finally, the Task Force drew on the wide professional knowledge and experience of its members to form recommendations.

The Task Force takes satisfaction in having compiled a comprehensive statistical review which is published as a separate technical paper. It represents a milestone in labour market data gathering for British Columbia. Kept up-to-date, it will continue to be a valuable tool for future labour market policy makers.

Overall, the research painted a picture of the British Columbia workforce very different from the one that existed just 20 years ago. The obvious implication was that today's workforce has a different set of needs and goals which had to be addressed by the Task Force's recommendations.

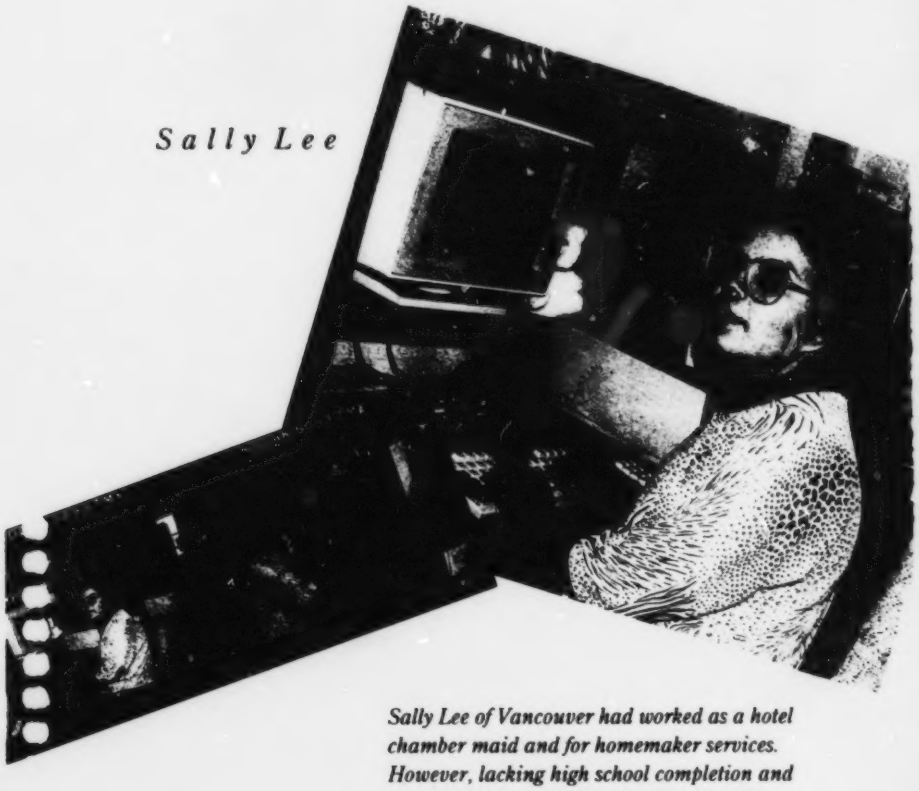
For example, women accounted for more than 60 per cent of the employment growth in British Columbia between 1975 and 1990. In actual numbers during that period, employment of women increased by almost 80 per cent. Employment of men increased by about 30 per cent. Women now account for 45 per cent of the employed workforce — up from 37 per cent in 1975.

Generally, there is evidence that the British Columbia workforce is being segmented into good jobs and bad jobs. Good jobs offer better pay, benefits and security than do the bad jobs. Incomes are polarizing at the high and low ends of the scale. Jobs with incomes at the middle range are declining. The use of part-time work is increasing, particularly in periods of economic slow-down. Today, more British Columbians are working at part-time jobs even though they want full-time work.

The overall unemployment rate in British Columbia in 1990 was 8.2 per cent. During the 1980s, the unemployment rate fluctuated from a low of 6.8 per cent in 1981 to a high of 14.7 per cent in 1984. Unemployment rates vary by region throughout the province. The Lower Mainland consistently has the lowest unemployment rate and high unemployment rates are consistently recorded in the Lillooet-Thompson region and the West Kootenay region.

There is some evidence of a reduction in the variation among regions by 1990 compared to the recession period.

Sally Lee



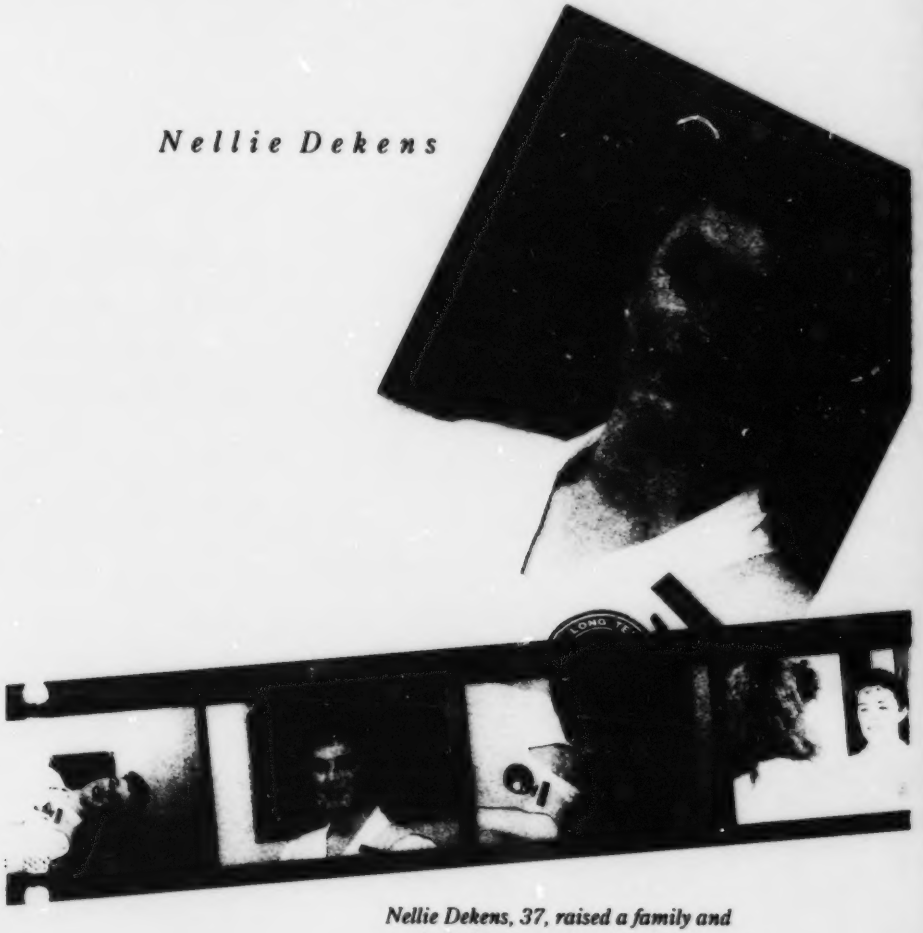
Sally Lee of Vancouver had worked as a hotel chamber maid and for homemaker services. However, lacking high school completion and career skills, she was frustrated in her efforts to find other employment.

She began preparing to achieve her new job goals by enrolling in a women's employment skills training program at a private college in Vancouver. Through the course she secured Grade 12 equivalency. More than that, the college's daily personal development seminars allowed her to improve her communication skills, assertiveness, and stress management.

From the women's employment training skills program, she moved to an employment transition course at the same college. Besides providing on-the-job clerical training through job placements, the course taught job search skills, including resume writing and interview management. Today Lee, who is a single parent with three children, works at Urban Images, a pre-employment program for native women in Vancouver, as well as for the Professional Native Women's Association.

Lee advocates the development of new pre-employment programs to deal with personal problems even before the academic programs begin. "You have to be happy with yourself before you can get anywhere academically."

Nellie Dekens



Nellie Dekens, 37, raised a family and worked with her husband in their grocery business. Then, after the business was sold, she found work in a plywood mill in Port Alberni. Despite persistent rumours of a shutdown, she was employed there for three and a half years. The shutdown became a reality for Dekens and 350 other workers in the summer of 1991. She decided to pursue a career as a long-term care aide, a move she had been considering for some time in light of the shutdown rumours. She is enrolled in a long-term care aide course at the Port Alberni campus of North Island College. Her tuition fees are being paid by the Port Alberni Adjustment Committee.

Dekens and her co-workers received almost six months notice of the mill shutdown, which she says helped them adjust to the transition. She advocates improvements in the rules covering advance notice so that workers can leave early for other jobs or re-training without compromising their severance packages.

The evidence concerning structural employment — which is unemployment that results from a mismatch between the requirements of vacant jobs and the attributes of unemployed workers — was varied. During the 1980s, unemployment increased, but so did the number of job vacancies, indicating a growth in structural unemployment. However, since 1989, the evidence is that there had been a decrease in structural unemployment.

On close study of the data, the Task Force determined that, overall, unemployment is affecting fewer people but for longer periods. This indicates that some people are bearing a disproportionate share of the burden of unemployment. This extra burden is not confined to any particular group of workers.

Another useful indicator of structural unemployment is long-term unemployment, commonly defined as unemployment that lasts longer than six months. While long-term unemployment as a proportion of total unemployment increased substantially in British Columbia during the recession of the early 1980s, the rate had returned to pre-recession level by 1990.

Research indicated that a worker's level of education was a key factor in determining how long she or he stayed unemployed or was forced to accept part-time employment. Workers with low levels of education have higher rates of unemployment and are unemployed for longer periods when they lose jobs. During the 1980s there was also a tendency for less educated workers to withdraw from the labour market.

The provincial government has forecast that over the next 10 years nearly three quarters of all new jobs to be created in British Columbia will require at least some post-secondary education.

British Columbians unemployed during the 1980s recession cited an overall shortage of work, of course, when they were asked the reasons they were having trouble finding new jobs. However, 45.3 per cent of them also pointed to their own lack of experience; 44.2 per cent to a lack of skills; 40.4 per cent to a lack of education; and 25.5 per cent to a lack of information.

These are examples of the labour market difficulties addressed by the recommendations.

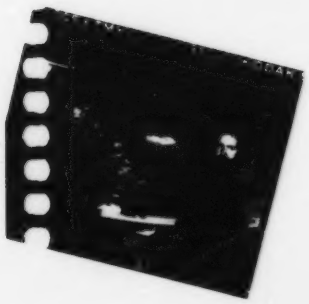
This summary only outlines the recommendations. For a detailed presentation of the research, the steps taken in developing the recommendations and the full rationale for those recommendations, readers are encouraged to study the main report.

Throughout its work, the Task Force has recognized that labour market development programs must be affordable — to industry, to unions, to individual workers, and to British Columbia taxpayers.

The recommendations amount to a framework for promoting lifelong learning — at schools, colleges, universities, in apprenticeship programs and at work — to allow all British Columbians to prosper in the global economy.

Stewart Cameron

"I wanted something that would be permanent, something that I would like doing," Stewart Cameron says of his decision to pursue a career in auto body repair. Cameron, 28, is a status Indian from the Fort St. James band north of Prince George. He dropped out of high school in grade nine and went to work in a sawmill. The work was mostly part-time. After four years at the mill, he took a logging job, which lasted almost six years. The wages were good but the work was seasonal.



After a period of unemployment, he moved to Prince George to pursue his ambition of becoming an apprentice in auto body repair. He prepared a resume and visited "every body shop in Prince George" looking for an apprentice position. Because he lacked experience, there were no offers. Then he learned about and enrolled in the career skills co-op education program at the College of New Caledonia. During the six-month course, college staff arranged a job placement for Cameron with an auto body shop that had come under new management. The shop has agreed to accept Cameron for a four-year apprenticeship program once he's completed his academic upgrading. "I don't think I could have got this far without co-op education."

MEETING THE NEEDS: THE RECOMMENDATIONS

APPOINT A LEADERSHIP AGENCY

The provincial government should establish the British Columbia Council on Training and Employment. This permanent agency would provide continuity and co-ordination in developing and implementing labour market policies by industry, labour and government. It would also provide a vehicle for achieving consensus on appropriate labour market policies.

The proposed British Columbia Council on Employment and Training should be assigned the role of co-ordinating labour market policy and programs, private sector consultation and labour market policy re ews.

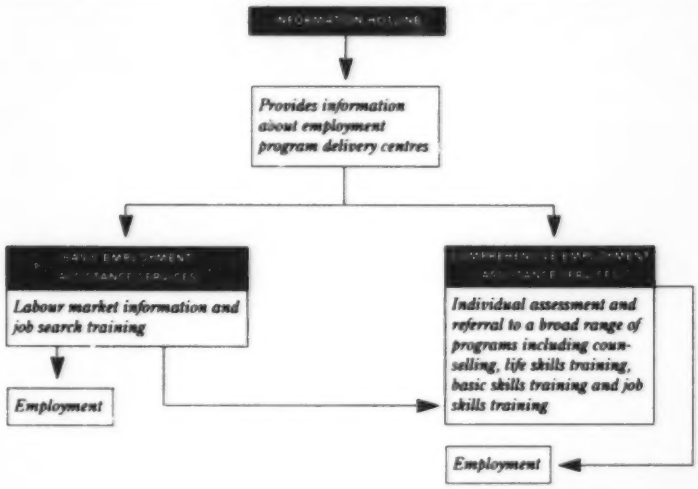
ADOPT AN INTEGRATED MODEL

Labour market programs designed to address unemployment and adjustment should focus on the unique and specific needs of the individual, rather than perceived target group needs. Furthermore, programs must be comprehensive and accessible, to both the employed and the unemployed.

Anyone needing information about the labour market, or how to go about a job search, should have easy access to basic employment assistance services. Anyone needing extra help to enter the labour market — help such as counselling, life skills training, literacy trainin, or skills training — should have access to that assistance. The accompanying diagram shows how such an integrated labour market programs system might operate. The integrated model should be refined and tested through pilot programs introduced in selected communities.

To address potential employment problems for workers affected by major layoffs, the Task Force endorses the group advance notice provisions now included in the Employment Standards Act. Such notice helps laid off workers in their search for new jobs.

INTEGRATED MODEL DIAGRAM

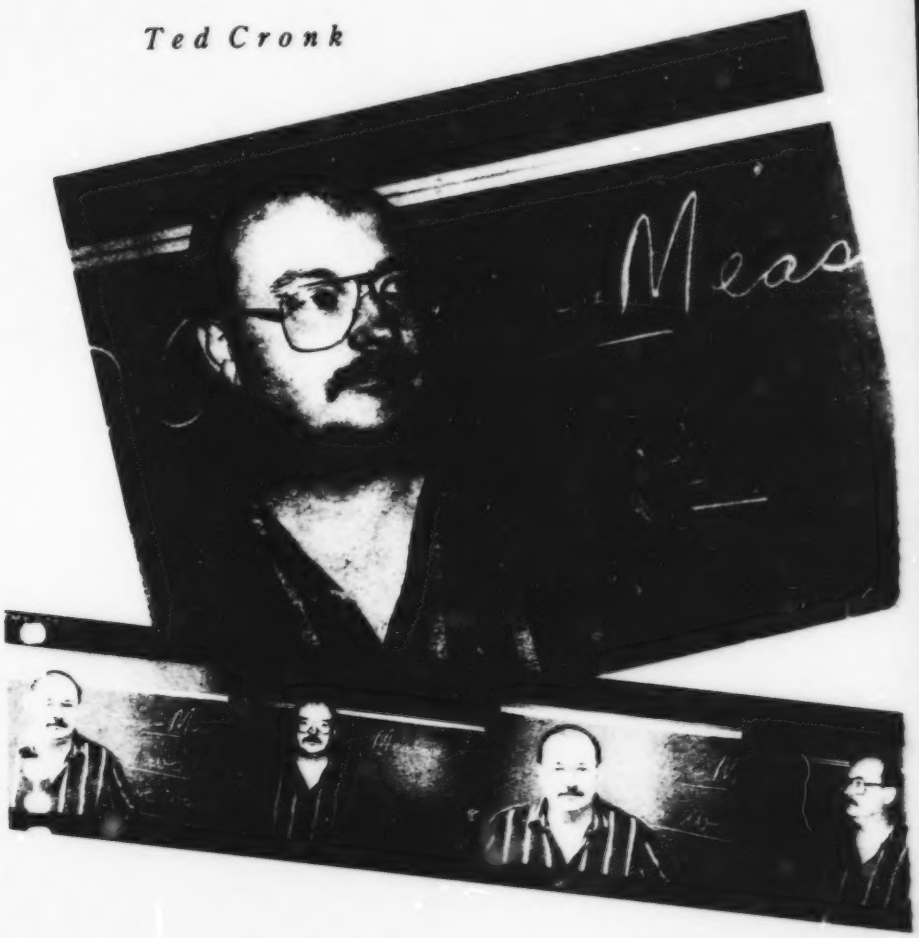

Provides information about employment program delivery centres
Labour market information and job search training
Employment
Individual assessment and referral to a broad range of programs including counselling, life skills training, basic skills training and job skills training
Employment

EXPAND CO-OP EDUCATION, WORK EXPERIENCE AND SIMILAR PROGRAMS

New programs of co-op education should be developed and existing course offerings should be expanded within the secondary and post-secondary school systems. Co-op education is an effective vehicle for career exploration and experimentation. It helps keep students interested in completing school and it promotes opportunities for further learning.

Uniform guidelines should be adopted to ensure quality control for secondary and post-secondary co-op programs. A mechanism should be developed to assign program credit and to provide resources to ensure adequate supervision and counselling for co-op education programs.

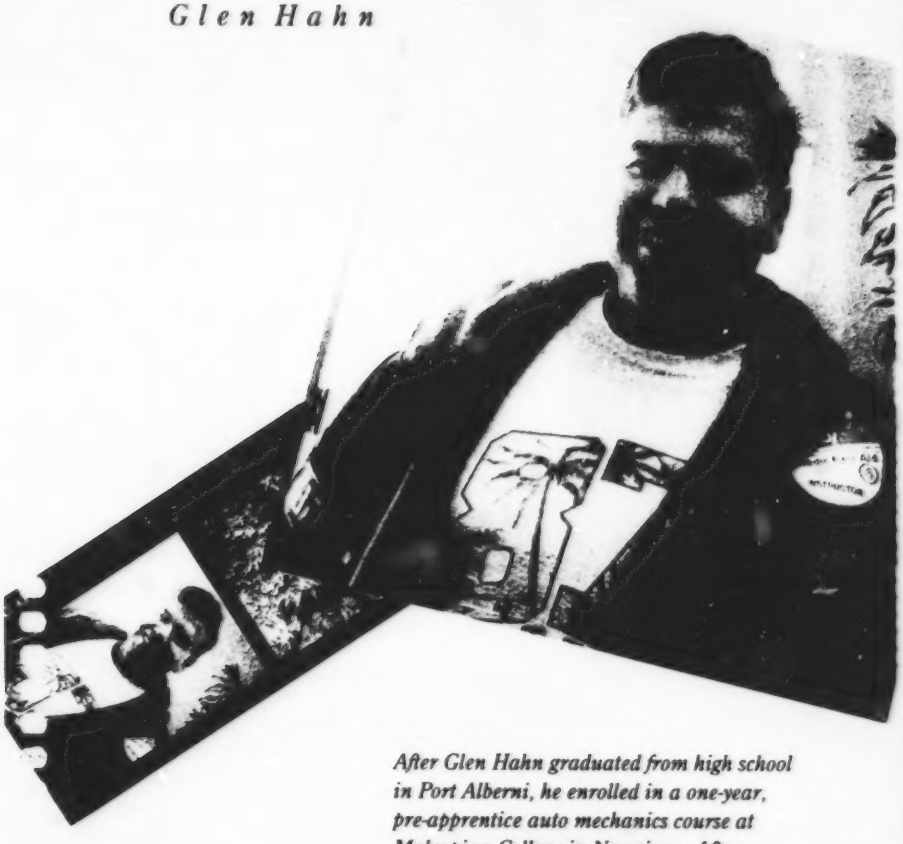
Ted Cronk



Though he had built up almost 20 years of experience, a chain of circumstances caught millwright Ted Cronk in a low-seniority job in the forest industry in Port Alberni. At the age of 40 he was bumped out of his job by a more senior worker from another mill. There was the possibility of work in other parts of the province but Cronk opted not to uproot his family. Instead, with the natural gas pipeline reaching Vancouver Island in the summer of 1991, he decided to retrain as a gas-fitter.

Cronk advocates pre-entry testing of apprentices to help assure a high success rate. As well, he suggests that new mills receiving government support be required to hire a percentage of apprentices as a condition of the support.

Glen Hahn



After Glen Hahn graduated from high school in Port Alberni, he enrolled in a one-year, pre-apprentice auto mechanics course at Malaspina College in Nanaimo. After completing the course with high marks, he looked for a job as an apprentice. "I got the standard Catch 22 scenario: Can't give you a job without experience. Can't get experience without a job." Eventually, he returned to Alberni and found a job on the green chain at a sawmill. After two and a half years, the mill closed and Hahn was out of work. He was 23 years old and facing the need to change career direction for the second time.

With financial help from the Port Alberni Adjustment Committee to pay his tuition costs, Hahn opted to turn his hobby — diving — into a career. He enrolled in a course sponsored by the Professional Association of Diving Instructors in Sidney and is now working as a diving instructor with Club Med in the Caribbean. Hahn advocates the distribution of more information to students, to point them in the direction of careers where there will be demand for workers in the future.

Systems should be established for evaluating the effectiveness of co-op education programs and for ensuring controlled growth for co-op education programs. Programs should not grow faster than the ability of employers to participate.

The provincial and federal governments should co-operate to ensure that adequate financial resources are available to cover both the start-up costs and on-going administrative costs of co-op programs.

While co-op education and work experience should not replace apprenticeship programs, programs incorporating work experience should be developed to ease students' transition to work and to promote career exploration.

PROMOTE APPRENTICESHIP AND WORKPLACE TRAINING

Industry and workers should be encouraged to assume greater responsibility for workplace training. In particular, industry should assume greater responsibility for deciding who should be trained and what type of training should be provided. Funds should be allocated to implement programs designed to remove obstacles to training.

Special attention should be devoted to encouraging sector-based training by industry.

The Provincial Apprenticeship Board has recommended changes to its mandate which would place responsibility for the apprenticeship system with business and labour through the Provincial Apprenticeship Board. The Task Force endorses this recommendation.

ENCOURAGE SKILL DEVELOPMENT

The capacity of vocational, career and technical institutions — private and public — to meet the needs of British Columbians for entry-level and upgrading opportunities should be improved. To meet current and developing needs, the skills development system needs to be more flexible and it needs to have greater capacity.

	Access to the training system should be open. This would include younger workers, women, older workers, social assistance recipients, natives, immigrants, visible minorities and persons with disabilities. Better access could be achieved through initiatives such as improved counselling, preparatory training, and English language training.
ESTABLISH TRAINING FUNDS	*A funding mechanism should be established to support innovation in training and human resource planning and development. The funding should be administered by the proposed British Columbia Council on Training and Employment.*
SOLICIT FEEDBACK TO DEVELOP INCENTIVES	*The provincial government should use the proposed British Columbia Council on Training and Employment to solicit feedback on the most effective ways of providing incentives for training.*
COMMUNICATE	*An information hotline and a network of program delivery centres should be used to distribute information about training programs and to collect information on training needs which are not being met.* *A communications strategy should be developed and implemented to increase awareness throughout the province of the critical importance of human resource planning and skills development. It would also educate British Columbians about the changing nature of the world of work.*
REDUCE THE OVERLAPS, GAPS AND CONFUSION	*Governments should clearly delineate roles and responsibilities in labour market policy. British Columbia's new labour market policy must be designed to accommodate the needs of the unemployed and the needs of the employed workforce in a cost-effective way. Existing overlaps, gaps and confusion created by the labour market policies and programs of the two levels of government must be addressed. The new Canada/British Columbia Labour Force Development Agreement provides one avenue through which this can be pursued.*

Ella Wall

Ella Wall of Prince George took advantage of the Career Skills Co-op Education program at the College of New Caledonia to realize her ambition to become a professional driver. The co-op program allowed her to take the core courses and supplement them with a two-week job placement at a Prince George auto dealership. After completing the co-op program, she went on and completed a professional driving course. Today, she drives a school bus, with the prospect of at least five years of steady employment.

"I've never known where to go or who to see about getting a career going," said Wall, a 34-year-old single parent with two children. She had dropped out of school at Grade 8 and worked from time to time as a hotel maid.

"When I was interviewed for the career skills program I knew definitely that I needed it . . . because that would get me started."

The provincial government should formalize a periodic labour market briefing conference to include both elected officials and employees of the provincial government.

The provincial government should develop ways to promote information sharing and the co-ordination of policies and programs affecting the employment market.

EVALUATE PROGRAMS

All provincial labour market programs should be subject to evaluation for effectiveness. Programs of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology should be evaluated by, or under the auspices of, the Ministry.

FILL THE RESEARCH VOID

The Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology should maintain and update the work done by the Task Force and conduct a review to determine where additional research is needed.

The Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology should review its labour market policy data needs. The need to create more data sources should be assessed. For example, the Ministry should review the need for a survey of the nature and extent of workplace training, including workplace literacy training, in British Columbia.

The Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology should appoint a technical advisory committee composed of individuals with expertise in the field of labour market analysis to assist the Ministry in areas of research and statistics.